The Simile of the Cloth

A Path to a Luminous Mind

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A Stained Cloth Cannot Take a Beautiful Color

The Buddha begins with a simple analogy: Imagine a dyer takes a stained, grimy cloth and dips it into a vat of blue, yellow, or red dye. The result will be ill-dyed and blotchy.

Why is this so? Because the cloth was not clean.

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In the Same Way, a Defiled Mind Leads to an Unhappy Destination

The Buddha draws a direct parallel from the cloth to the mind. He explains that when the mind is clouded with impurities and defilements, an unfortunate future or rebirth is to be expected. The state of the mind determines the quality of one's experience.

But a Pristine Cloth Dyes Perfectly

Conversely, if the cloth is pristine and bright, it will absorb the dye beautifully, resulting in a pure, vibrant color. “Why is this so? Because the cloth was clean.”

The Parallel: “In the same way, when the mind is undefiled, a happy destination can be expected.”

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What are the Stains that Defile the Mind?

The first step on the path of purification is to recognize the specific “stains” or defilements that cloud the mind’s natural clarity. The Buddha identifies sixteen such impurities.

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The Sixteen Defilements of the Mind (1/2)

1. Covetousness & Greed
2. Ill Will
3. Anger
4. Hostility & Malice
5. Denigration & Contempt
6. Domineering & Insolence
7. Envy
8. Jealousy & Stinginess

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The Sixteen Defilements of the Mind (2/2)

9. Deceit & Fraud
10. Hypocrisy
11. Obstinacy
12. Presumption & Rivalry
13. Conceit
14. Arrogance
15. Vanity & Intoxication
16. Heedlessness & Negligence

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The Path Begins with Abandonment

The practitioner, having understood these qualities as defilements of the mind, abandons them. Knowing each one as a stain that corrupts the heart, one works to wash it away, release it, and be free of it.

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With the Stains Removed, Unshakable Faith Arises

A purified mind gains unwavering confidence founded on understanding:

- The Buddha: The perfectly enlightened teacher.
- The Dhamma: The well-expounded teaching; timeless, visible here and now, and to be realized by the wise.
- The Sangha: The community practicing the path well; a supreme field of merit.

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Faith Gives Rise to Joy and Tranquility

Realizing this new purity brings a natural progression of states:

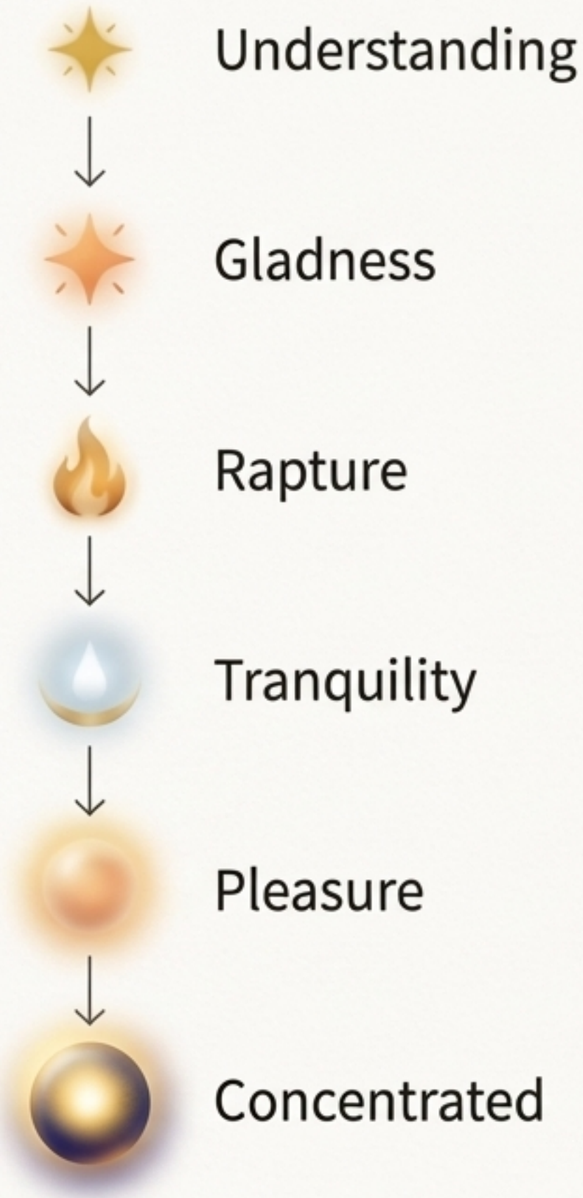
Understanding brings Gladness.

Gladness gives rise to Rapture.

Rapture leads to bodily Tranquility.

Tranquility allows for Pleasure (*sukha*).

A mind feeling pleasure becomes Concentrated (*samadhi*).



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The Purified Mind is Luminous and Receptive

Just as a stained cloth, once washed, becomes bright, or as gold, freed from dross, becomes malleable and brilliant, the purified mind is intrinsically radiant and capable.

"Even if that monk partakes of the finest rice with many sauces, it is no obstacle for him."

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Radiating Boundless Goodness

The purified mind extends limitless positive qualities in all directions—above, below, and all around—to the entire world, free from hostility or ill will.

Loving-Kindness (Metta)
Compassion (Karuna)
Empathetic Joy (Mudita)
Equanimity (Upekkha)

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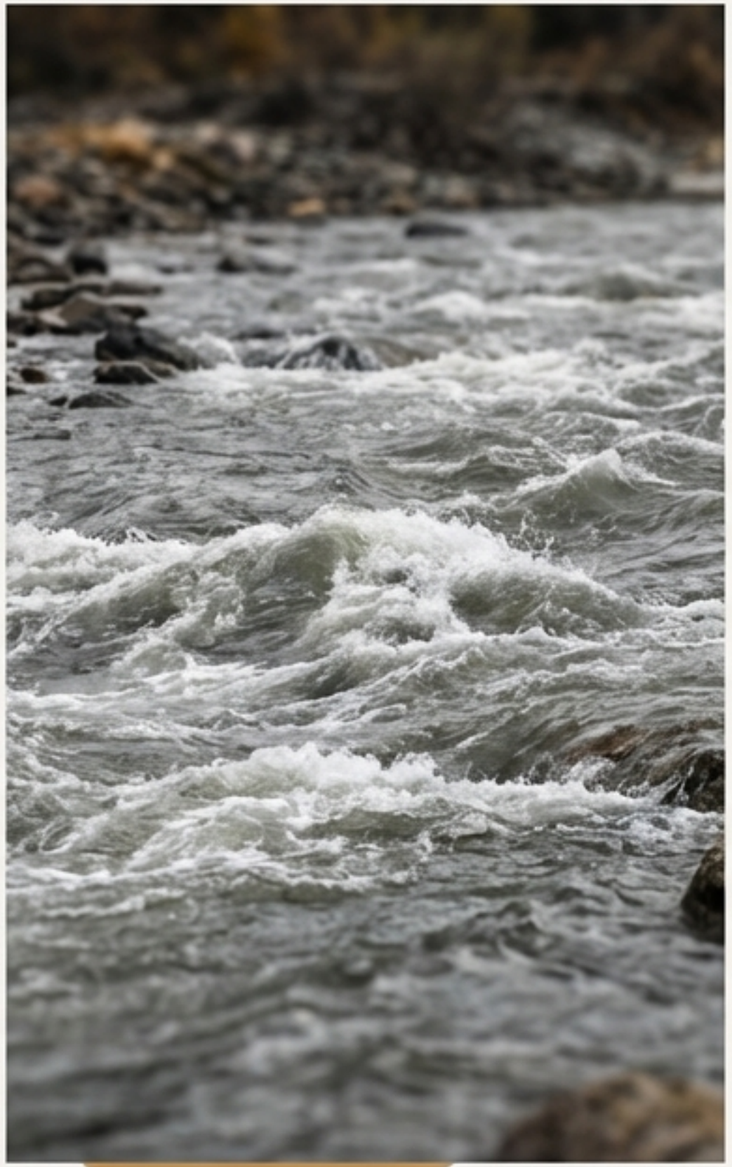

A Test of Purity: Inner vs. Outer

At that time, a brahmin named Sundarika Bharadvaja was sitting nearby. He believed that bathing in sacred rivers, like the Bahuka, could wash away evil deeds.

He asked the Buddha, “Does the Master Gotama not go to the Bahuka river to bathe for purification?”

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What Can a River Do?

“What can the Bahuka, the Gaya, or the Sundarika river do? They cannot purify the evil-doer. For the one who is pure, every day is auspicious. Here, O brahmin, is where you should bathe: in this very Make yourself a sanctuary for all beings. If you do not lie, or harm living beings, or take what is not given; if you have faith and are free from stinginess… what need is there to go to Gaya? Any well is Gaya for you.

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From Overturned to Upright

Profoundly moved, the Brahmin described the teaching as “turning upright what was overturned.” He asked for ordination and, through diligent practice, cleansed the sixteen defilements from his own mind.

The text concludes: “He became one of the Arahants,” having realized for himself the end of birth and the completion of the path.

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